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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 3923
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1740
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1607
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2176
RUEAWJA/DOJ WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEABND/DEA HQS WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000783

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: CUSTOMS CHIEF FIRED AMID REPORTS OF
SERIOUS WRONGDOING

REF: ASHGABAT 0301

Classified By: CDA Richard E. Hoagland: 1.4 (B), (D).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Following briefings from senior officials of military and law enforcement agencies, President Berdimuhamedov fired Turkmenistan's Chief of the State Customs Service and reshuffled State Customs Service and State Immigration Service personnel during a June 19, 2008, meeting of Turkmenistan's National Security Council. According to Turkmenistan's state media, an investigation is underway in the State Customs Service regarding "numerous violations by officers of various sections of this body." According to embassy sources, this investigation is connected to an unknown "big incident" at the border crossing at Serakhs, on Turkmenistan's border with Iran. If the investigation reveals very serious results, jail time for the former Customs chief is not precluded. Also during the meeting, the head of the State Immigration Service unveiled samples of new biometric passports which will be issued starting in July 2008. END SUMMARY.

SHUFFLE IN POWER MINISTRIES...AND NEW PASSPORTS

¶2. (U) Following briefings from senior officials of military and law enforcement agencies, President Berdimuhamedov fired State Customs Service Chairman Muratberdi Annaliyev at a June 19 meeting of Turkmenistan's National Security Council meeting. (NOTE: Annaliyev, who has served as customs chief since 2006, was one of the last of former President Niyazov's "old guard." END NOTE.) The president said that he was firing Annaliyev for grave shortcomings, failure to fulfill his duties and for failure to fulfill the tasks of ensuring the legality and discipline of those under his supervision. The president named State Immigration Service Chairman Yaylym Berdiyev as the new Customs chief, and appointed State Immigration Service Deputy Chairman Yaran Sadykov as the Immigration Service's Acting Chairman. The media reported that an investigation is underway in the State Customs

Service regarding "numerous violations by officers of various sections of this body." The head of the State Immigration Service also presented samples of new biometric passports that will be issued starting in July 2008.

RUMORS OF TROUBLE AT SERAKHS

13. (C) According to an embassy FSN who deals frequently with both customs and immigration personnel (please protect), the investigation concerns an unknown "major incident" that occurred at Serakhs, Turkmenistan's busiest port of entry located on the Iranian border. The government does not want any details about this incident to get out, and no one knows anything about it because it is being handled so discreetly. Although it did not appear in the news, according to this employee, the head of the Serakhs border crossing checkpoint was also fired.

BERDIYEV BIO

14. (SBU) Prior to his appointment as Chairman of the State Customs Service, Yaylym Berdiyev served as Chairman of the State Immigration Service since May 21, 2008, and as Chairman of the organization under its previous name of State Service for Registration of Foreign Citizens since November 29, 2006. From November 29, 2006, until February 21, 2007, he also served as Chief of the Department of Analysis of Performance of Law Enforcement and the Military of the Presidential Apparatus. Embassy personnel who have had contact with him have described him as friendly, helpful, and honest. He has

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been hosted in embassy homes and was one of the few government officials to attend the opening of the U.S.-built Altyn Asyr border crossing checkpoint in November 2006. Berdiyev participated in an embassy-sponsored exchange program that included travel to the United States.

15. (C) COMMENT: Berdimuhamedov continues to clean his cabinet of members of Niyazov's "old guard." While officials who were recently fired (reftel) have not been jailed as would have happened in the past, Annaliyev may find himself doing time if, in fact, he was involved in -- or culpable of -- criminal wrongdoing. We will continue to seek details and hope to report more fully what happened at Serakhs. END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND